Gaze as Embodied Ethics: Homelessness, the Other, and Humanity

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In this chapter, our goal is to critically examine the social phenomenon of homelessness by questioning our own presumptions and humanity as well as the social theories developed to explain homelessness. We want to start our discussion with a childhood story of the first author:

> In 1964, when I was seven years old, my family traveled from our suburban home in Ohio to the New York World's Fair. We took a tour of the city and at some point we were on the edge of the Bowery neighborhood filled with flophouses and disaffected people. According to my father, I got separated from the group and when they found me I was squatting down next to and chatting with a "bum." I don't recall any of my conversation with the "bum" but I do recall the extraordinary machinations of my father and the very peculiar look on his face as he pulled me away from the homeless man, apologetically but urgently. The situation was for me, and I think my father too, totally dissonant. It seemed clear that I was being both good and bad at the same time. The man had caught my eye and waved at me. So I waved back and went over to talk to him. My father's look of concern mixed with anxiety and an urgency to get me away (to… safety?) yet politely, apologetically, with a fake smile is something I never forgot.

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I recall my relieved mother and father laughing at my naiveté with each retelling of the story. So far as I recall it was the first time I'd heard the word "wino." They are dirty and may be sick, even perverted. So I had unwittingly treated this abnormal man normally and that was wrong. Yes, I had done the right thing. He was old and kind (he had waved to me) and I should respect my elders but …

My parents seemed both relieved when they saw what I was doing and yet eager to terminate the interaction. That was the essence of the dissonance I now believe. How can someone be both harmless yet repulsive? I had violated norms and expectations because, for the first time, I had encountered a different kind of person and I did not understand. I needed to learn, to be socialized to fear the Other, even if they were harmless even friendly, indeed perhaps worthy of pity.

How we react to things exhibits our courage, our cowardice, our empathy, our narcissism, our sensitivity and empathy, our idiocy or dumb senselessness—our humanity. In the slightest hesitation to return a hug or smile, to reach out and take the hand offered, we are exposed. We cannot avoid responsibility. Ethics, along with its moral obligations, is embodied through our existence (Honneth, 1996). Lévinas (1978/1978, 1979/1987) argues that we as human beings summon each other as moral beings and that this organic way of communicating with the Other *preempts* what may become competitive or instrumental communication. When we see each other, we are beheld as an Other. The event of encountering is a summons to respond—to reciprocate, to communicate. When we refuse, when we feign ignorance and innocence, when we avert our eyes, step away, or neglect to complete our side of a greeting, we are offending (Honneth, 2000/2014). Such understanding of ethics, our moral obligations to one another as fellow human beings, is universal because it transcends any individual culture. It calls out the shared embodiment of human existence.

In the following sections, we aim to explore the cultural conditions that make the existence of the homeless possible. In particular, we adopt the approaches of cultural phenomenology, a subfield of phenomenology. Building on the phenomenological investigations of Husserl (1962) that aim to seek authentic meaning in the primordial world of daily existence, cultural phenomenologists are interested in the reciprocal constitution of cultural artifacts (e.g., communication and public discourse) and constituted subjectivities (i.e., human consciousness) in everyday life (Clucas, 2000; Gebser, 1949–1953/1985). For example, Geertz (1973) attributed Paul Ricoeur for

his notion of ethnography and Gilbert Ryle for his approach to thick description, equating examination of humanness with doing semiotics and hermeneutics. He explained: "The concept of culture I espouse, and whose utility [I] attempt to demonstrate, is essentially a semiotic one" (Geertz, 1973, p. 5). He argued that the aim of anthropology is "[A]n aim to which a semiotic concept of culture is peculiarly well adapted. As interworked systems of construable signs, culture is not a power, something to which social events, behaviors, institutions, or processes can be causally attributed; it is a context, something within which they can be intelligibly – that is, thickly – described" (p. 14). We follow the traditions and approaches of these theorists.

By critically questioning the cultural conditions that make the existence of the homeless possible, we reflect on the lack of sentimentality to this vulnerable population. We hasten to emphasize that sentiment and sentience share the same root. By incorporating narratives from homeless people in a Southwest college town in the United States,[1] we will demonstrate that our arguments are supported not just by the theoretical basis and ethics of the primordial obligations that govern us all but also by the subjective, empirical, and lived experiences of the homeless. By highlighting the fragmentation of cultural consciousness and the desire to develop a universal, context-free understanding of the marginalized, we use the homeless phenomenon in the United States[2] to extrapolate the cultural conditions that facilitate such structures of human consciousness (i.e., a cultural phenomenology approach).

[1] All procedures and data reported here have been approved by the Institutional Review Board of the University of Oklahoma. Details of research methods and participants have been reported elsewhere (Hsieh, 2016; Terui & Hsieh, in press). The narratives were excerpts of interviews with people who rely on a local homeless shelter for resources to cope with everyday challenges. The excerpts were chosen as they best reflect and embody the central themes of our arguments in each section. The participants have been given pseudonyms that starts with *H* (e.g., Helen and Hank).

[2] While the term "homeless" implies a unified definition of the population (i.e., those without homes), the reality of the homeless are far more complicated (Lee, Tyler, & Wright, 2010). For example, researchers have argued that how "home" is defined and understood may create differences in whether one is considered homeless or not (Gowan, 2010; Somerville, 1992; Tipple & Speak, 2005). Tipple and Speak (2005, p. 350) noted, "[T]he margin between homeless and inadequately housed is much more vague and can be set very low, excluding squatters, or very high, including all who are not owners or renters of formally approved dwellings." As a result, estimates of the prevalence of homelessness often vary significantly due to differences in how homelessness is defined. As a result, rather than discussing the issue of homelessness at a global level, which is complicated by the varied definitions of homelessness, we have limited our discussion to the homelessness in the United States.

Gaze as Embodied Ethics

I've run into it a lot of times, where people, they see somebody carrying a backpack or bag of clothes and they go, "Oh, that's a homeless person. Stay away." And they avoid 'em like the plague. And for a lot of [the homeless], just saying hi to them makes their day. Don't, don't, don't make 'em invisible. They're not invisible. They are here. You know, treat them as people. And that's where they struggle because this is how they're getting treated. You get treated like dirt. Eventually, you're gonna believe you're dirt. – Hannie

We are beheld as we behold. The homeless person who looks back at us captures us in their gaze. We are caught in the act of choice. Choice is fundamental in our conceptualization of ethics. Without choice, there is no free will; thus, no place for discussion of ethics (van Inwagen, 1983). Ethical dilemma comes as we are faced with difficult choices.

Sentience summons reciprocity (Greene & Haidt, 2002; Honneth, 1996). When we are confronted with the sight of the homeless, we are forced into making choices. This moment exposes us to judgment about how we will react when confronted with the vulnerability of a fellow human being (Honneth, 2000/2014). This exposure, this inescapable judgment is made mostly by our own conscience. There is no way to avoid assessment. We know, as positively as we know anything, what is the right thing to do. Such moral judgment is best understood as affect-laden intuitions that "appear suddenly and effortlessly in consciousness [….] without any feeling of having gone through steps of searching, weighing evidence, or inferring a conclusion" (Greene & Haidt, 2002, p. 517). Our conscience threatens our view of ourselves as good and moral beings. Their presence, their sentience, weighs on us. We try to eliminate not only them as a specter but to escape ourselves as we look away to avoid eye contact or to remove the homeless' presence in public space (Amster, 2003; National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty, 2014a, b). If we can remove the homeless from our gaze, we remove the chance of ourselves being beheld with moral imperative (Honneth, 1996, 2000/2014).

Primordial Obligation

I'm out here and they get scared cause whenever you're homeless, they just make a wide turn around you. Cause they think we're gonna do something. – Hank

If you bring a bag walking on the road, and they are looking at you and realize that you are a homeless, they'll make a big… walking around you and avoid contacting with you. – Hadley

Most of us aren't bad people or nasty people or crazy people or anything like that. We're just trying to live life each day like everyone else. – Hugo

The major issue discussed in this chapter is our ethical obligation to one another as fellow human beings (see also Honneth, 1996; Honneth, 2000/2014). Globalization of modern dissociation has accelerated two great extinctions: cultures and languages are disappearing rapidly, and diversity of life is collapsing (Kramer, Adkins, Kim, & Miller, 2014). In the animistic world, everything was aware of us. In that consciousness, awareness was concern—care (Gebser, 1949–1953/1985, 1997). We were not alone. So we followed elaborate forms of etiquette that guided our behavior lest we trespass against some spirit, god, ancestor, or specter. Everything was to be respected. Everything was sacred.

According the theory of dimensional accrual and dissociation (Kramer, 1997, 2013), a human history of increasing dissociation or alienation from each other corresponds with the history of increasing fragmentation and individualism. It is important not to simplify this as a process of Westernization. Rather, the increasing fragmentation and individualism transcend across cultures (Gebser, 1949–1953/1985; Kramer, 1992). The history of humanity can be seen as a process of individual ego-identity emerging from the larger world. At first we were part of nature. Before *Homo Sapien Sapien* emerged, our ancestors lived in extended groups, mostly blood relatives. We knew each other from birth to death. This was the world we evolved in as highly social beings who cared deeply about each other and our environment. Ritual, which emotionally bound us, along with language and tool making stretches far back into our prehistoric past (Alexander, 2004; Bourdieu, 1990). Then we began to see ourselves as separate from nature and created complex systems in attempts to confront and control nature (Kramer, 1992). As time passed further fragmentation occurred. "The people," broke into tribes, then the tribes broke down into extended clans, then those split into extended families, and those into nuclear families. Slowly we settled into Mesolithic and Neolithic hamlets followed later by villages that were self-sustaining (Otte, 2009). The last Mesolithic peoples exist in tiny pockets deep in the Amazon (Gross, 2015). And Neolithic hamlets are disappearing from our

world (McCarter, 2012). The modern city must colonize surrounding land and peoples because it cannot feed itself (Kramer et al., 2014). With each fragmentation, ego-identity separated a bit more from the rest of existence. Eventually the modern individual with all his/her self-interests, from privacy to civil liberties, created to protect the individual from the collective was established. Ego-identity fragmented into id, ego, superego, and then was in danger of being lost entirely (Kramer, 1992, 1997). The great delusion of wealth is that the Self is self-sustaining. Alienation is the plague of modernity (Kramer, 1997).

The world we evolved in over millions of years is rapidly being replaced by modern urban environments. Over the course of time, the universe which was previously animistic, meaning alive with spirits everywhere, full and finite, has been replaced by a universe that is largely a dead and infinite void of vibrating bits of matter (e.g., atoms). The modern universe, being constituted of dead "building blocks," does not know we are here or care and inversely, we are free to move mountains, dam rivers, even reengineer life itself with only our own self-interests guiding us. This means that the way we interact with, communicate with everything, including each other, has changed fundamentally (Kramer et al., 2014). This change in social relations is rooted in a deeper shift in human existence, in human consciousness (Gebser, 1949–1953/1985; Kramer, 2013; Kramer et al., 2014).

The evaporation of sentimentality and care becomes inevitable. It is a consequence of material reductionism (Kramer, 2013; Kramer et al., 2014). Care and aid have been shifted onto institutions of the modern mass society such as government agencies, schools, churches, hospitals, daycares, and nursing homes. With commodification of care, we increasingly see each other as customers for services that were not long ago rooted in thick emotional networks. Care has vanished.[3] As the community (and Self) becomes smaller, the Others increase in number. Others are no longer what the Self is connected (emotionally or spiritually) to but are reduced in quantifiable, measurable "values" (Marx, 1935).

In this world, if a marginalized population is numerically small, they are deemed insignificant—ignorable—or correctable, meaning that they can

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[3] It is important not to simplify such understanding as an East vs. West dichotomy. Such consequence is not a simple result of "Westernization" either. Rather, this world emerges in response to the increasing fragmentation of our construction of the Self, our cultural consciousness.

be assimilated and disappear into and as identical with the larger population. If they are not quantifiably productive—exploitable, they are seen as having no value (Filho, 2002). Before we know it, we begin to avoid the undesirable Others. The first move to avoid the Other and their gaze is to abstract the Other and objectify them (Kramer & Lee, 1999).

Homeless people, who lack value reduced to a function within a structure, are ignored and considered irrelevant as they are constructed as the Other. By associating homelessness with disorder and criminality, local authorities justify their strategies to harass, punish, or restrict the homeless' presence in public space (Amster, 2003; National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty, 2014a, b). Mitchell (1997, p. 307) concluded: "The intent is clear: to control behavior and space such that homeless people simply cannot do what they must do in order to survive without breaking laws. Survival itself is criminalized." This is the move of *transcendence*, to construct the Other as a concept as opposed to a living, feeling human being, which evokes our primordial obligation through embodied ethics. The homeless is reduced to some quantifiable variable categorized through economic, sociologic, psychologic, or some other quantity—"ratio"nal perspective. They become an issue of budgets, political calculus, and/or public health.

Authentic Communication and the Struggle to Remain Inherently Meaningful

> They think we're all drunks, but we're not. I'm an engineer. Then I had seven heart attacks and five surgeries. – Harris

> The biggest struggle I face is forgiving people and any of the struggles I face. Ignoring people calling me a bum, looking at me as homeless. They think I'm homeless, or a druggie or an alcoholic, or a sexual deviant or anything like that. That's a big struggle: When people look at you like that and you're not that. And you can't react! Or you would be that. – Homer

Buber (1937/1958) argued that authentic communication between two who see each other as equally alive and aware, be it another human or a totem animal, has an inherent moral dimension which he called *reciprocity*, which is fundamental to our embodied experiences of ethics. When we behold each other as merely objects with extension, statistical values, we are not communicating. Lévinas (1978/1978, 1979/1987) has argued

that when we are fixed by the gaze of the Other, each sensing the Other as alive and aware, a shared dimension of mortality, fear, and responsibility prevails. Being so captured by the gaze of the Other looking back at us, be it an animal in a trap or an enemy in the crosshairs, we cannot escape moral obligation. Sentiment prevents us from discarding and ruining things, including and especially relationships (Greene & Haidt, 2002; Honneth, 1996, 2000/2014).

Even for the disillusioned Modern, when another sentient being looks back at us and sees us as sentient, the gaze is essentially different from glancing at a random rock, mountain, cloud, or some other dead, nameless object (this is why naming is so powerful). When gazing at another person who looks back, we feel a mutual recognition of life (Honneth, 1996), which is different from the fetish we might have for a dead object. Objectifying other animals or humans is thus a dangerous way to regard Others (Kramer et al., 2014), a dangerous attitude because such a mode of regard or way of seeing them is care-*less*. It excludes them from mutuality, equality, and as such moral obligation.

The city is filled with a vast aggregate of individuals who are largely anonymous to each other. The dimension of care that used to be the emotional cohesion of "we" has evaporated, replaced by modern functional structural patterns of instrumental interaction (see also Honneth, 2000/2014). As Morris (1996), has observed, competition has displaced cooperation. Measurable productivity is all that matters in the modern context. Society has thus fragmented moving unproductive people out of sight, and at least temporarily out of mind. They get in our way as we pursue "progress."

The homeless live in a parallel time and space (van Doorn, 2010). We see them "around." They skirt our scheduled time, showing up behind fast food places at closing for food and at shelters "in time" for a bed. The homeless belong nowhere, and have no place to be. They have no appointments to keep. We see them, but they are not part of our spatio-temporal manifold. They exist in Paleolithic modality on the fringe of our space, time, and economy. As such, they are not physically but psychosocially and culturally isolated. By associating homelessness with images of filth, decay, and disease, the public perpetuate the stereotypes, marginalization, and stigmatization of the homeless (Amster, 2003; Hsieh, in press), demanding social distance between the homeless and the community.

While media coverage traditionally has provided sympathetic and positive views toward the homeless, it often centers on the deficits and deviant characteristics of homeless people (Buck, Toro, & Ramos, 2004). By blurring

the boundaries between homeless people and individuals with mental illness, and attributing the increase of the homeless population to the closing of mental health care facilities in the 1980s, governments and media have reinforced negative stereotypes of the homeless and treated homelessness as a medical problem (Mathieu, 1993). By constructing homelessness as a "disease" or deviancy to be avoided by self-awareness and responsible behaviors, shelter staff encourage the homeless to look into themselves to identify causes of their homelessness, a practice that transforms the homeless into self-blaming and self-governing persons (Lyon-Callo, 2000). In other words, homeless people can only find redemption through submission to the regime of surveillance, discipline, and personal enhancement (Farrugia, Smyth, & Harrison, 2016; Wasserman & Clair, 2012, 2013). Trait psychology and forced assimilation is the dominant official discourse (Kramer, 2003).

Such public discourse reinforces our understanding of the Other. The routinized separation legitimizes "me"/"my" space and time. The homeless person who crosses "my" path violates my expectations, my dogmatic slumber but in a particularly valued way. Unlike seeing and recognizing a famous face or an exceptionally beautiful person that may excite me, the homeless challenges me (Honneth, 1996). They may even "ruin my day" by their mere appearance.

THE DILEMMA OF THE ALL-TOO-VISIBLE OTHERNESS OF THE HOMELESS

Just the looks you get when people are driving their kids to school in the morning. Just the looks you get because they see you carrying a bed roll. It goes from a happy good morning to an "ugh" in disgust. – Helen

Although many have called the homeless invisible people, we argue that the homeless are *not* invisible people. Very much to the contrary, they are not only visible to us but we are to them. This inconvenient reciprocity takes away our ability to control the moral dimension of the face-to-face encounter (Buber, 1937/1958; Lévinas, 1978/1978, 1979/1987). Insofar as we recognize the homeless as human, we cannot avoid the fact that they are *not* an Other but the same. To deny them is to deny ourselves in a hypocritically absurd effort to avoid responsibility. They look back at us as we look at them and in that act, we cannot avoid judgment.

My attitude toward the Other is what Scheler (1913–1916/1973) calls my *moral disposition*. It exists only in the act, not as a formal rule or value. Our moral judgments are largely driven by social intuitions (i.e., emotions; Greene & Haidt, 2002). Walking away from an Other in need thus demands reflection on who we are (Honneth, 2000/2014). We will be judged by what we do. This is the experiential origin of value (Scheler, 1913–1916/1973). Value is not logically derived. It is given immediately in experience (Greene & Haidt, 2002).

A Failing Culture

Being homeless is the most challenging thing I have ever faced. It is the worst thing ever. My mind started to drift in ways – I don't mind telling you – I had thoughts that I didn't go through with. But it was no different than what any homeless person's thoughts are. – Haiden

There is another way to look at culture, which does not presume any transcultural standards of behavior or beliefs. It is more fundamental. Becker (2010) suggested that culture has a function: to provide a stable set of social conditions that allow its members to fulfill meaningful roles and to thus experience a sense of belonging and self-esteem. Cultures that fail to do this for their members may be judged dysfunctional (Kramer & Hsieh, 2012).

For individuals who have no place within the socio-cultural system where they live, they are perceived as eyesores, visible blemishes on the social landscape. In the modern world, social relationships with a broad network of people is tenuous. If something happens to them, good or bad, few if anyone else within the established community knows or cares. Such a condition where individuals can live in the same physical spaces where established social activity takes place day in and day out but do not participate is most acute to modern urban life. It is a product of acute individualism and social dissociation (Kramer, 1997, in press).

The study of poverty by government agencies and social scientists is extensive. A few realities need to be recognized. Rossi (1989, p. 8) notes in his landmark book: "The more I looked into homelessness the more it appeared to be misstated as merely a problem of being without shelter: homelessness is more properly viewed as the most aggravated state of a more prevalent problem, extreme poverty." Rossi (1989, p. 9) concludes that being homeless is the result of "extreme deprivation" and that "a life

of extreme poverty is one of extreme vulnerability." There is an important psychological cost to being vulnerable.

Being homeless is a constant threat to millions of Americans who are not currently homeless but precariously close to it (National Health Care for the Homeless Council, 2015; Rossi, 1989). This means that the larger issue of extreme poverty, of which being literally homeless is but a result, has a much broader effect on millions of people who live in chronic fear of being literally out on the street. This includes millions of children and elderly who cannot fend for themselves (Henry, Cortes, & Morris, 2013; Kushel, 2012). Very few choose to be homeless (Terui & Hsieh, in press). Most end up in such a state due to forces such as addiction, illness, or age-related unemployment that are largely beyond their control (Gowan, 2010; Wasserman & Clair, 2010).

For the homeless population, homelessness, mental illness, and substance abuse are often confounding realities (Hsieh, 2016, in press). A meta-analysis found that among homeless people in Western countries, there is a pooled prevalence of 12.7% for psychotic illnesses, 11.4% for major depressions, 23.1% for personality disorder, 37.9% for alcohol dependence, and 24.4% for drug dependence (Fazel, Khosla, Doll, & Geddes, 2008). Rather than portraying a linear causal relationship between homelessness, mental illnesses, and substance abuse, many researchers have suggested a complex interrelationship between these factors. For example, a review found that people with schizophrenia and other psychotic disorders use substances to reduce general dysphoria, and possibly negative symptoms (Phillips & Johnson, 2001). Homeless and runaway youths may resort to substance abuse as a coping strategy to manage depressive systems, sexual minority status, street victimization, and problematic home life, including child abuse and parental drug use (Moskowitz, Stein, & Lightfoot, 2013; Tyler & Melander, 2013). As individuals exhaust their supportive prosocial networks, they may begin to seek support from individuals in the drug subculture, which can increase their own drug use behaviors (Galaif, Nyamathi, & Stein, 1999). The notion that it is homeless peoples' own fault that they find themselves in such dire straits is inaccurate.

A Culture of Modern Dissonance

> There ain't nothing to really say about myself. I just existing basically [laughs]. I know that- that ain't what you want to hear. I'm sorry. – Hayden

We are in the midst of one of the most connected, technologically advanced periods of human history. Yet, we are more disconnected from fellow human beings than ever (Kramer et al., 2014). Families are fragmented and collegial relationships are encouraged to remain purely professional. In this culture of modern dissociation, we argue that we are faced with the following conditions:

Axiom 1: Responsibility, culpability requires free will.
Axiom 2: Behavior cannot be ethical or moral unless it is based in choice, which presumes Axiom 1.
Axiom 3: Universal laws of nature operate autonomously from human choice.
Axiom 4: Economic behavior exhibits choice.
Conclusion: The universal algorithmic laws of economics assure predictability and deny the possibility of choice. Economics is therefore fatalistic.

Aristotle long ago asked a very simple question. He believed everyone knows basically the right thing to do. So why don't we? Reaching out to those in need is more constructive than simply stating the obvious that homelessness is bad and the homeless are weak/vulnerable. Stating the obvious without intervention is simply noise, if not immoral (Honneth, 2000/2014).

The Law of Laws: Reducing Choice and Morality Out of the Equation

Ah! This is always a choice. There is no formula. They never figure that out because everybody has a different story. There is absolutely no formula to get out of this position. – Hadley

Make no mistake. Being homeless is an economic condition. Political economy was the original name of a discipline that studied production and trade as behaviors which manifest cultural values, law, politics, and most important to this chapter, morality. For instance, scholars who study comparative wealth of nations note that where there is no political will to enact and enforce contract law, business flounders (Birks, 2005; Fried, 1981). Lack of meritocracy, uncertainty due to incoherent, inconsistent, and corrupt practices prevents modern economies from reaching their full

potential of wealth creation. Political economy was part and parcel of moral philosophy because it was clear that not all groups' and nations' economic behavior was the same and as such they did not exhibit identical success. How does one explain the fact that Japan, with practically no natural resources, has been a world economic power while parts of Africa abundant in valuable natural resources have languished in poverty without taking into account culture, politics, history, and geography? The only way to explain this variance is to examine the different factors that impact economic behavior and institutions. This is how Adam Smith, John Stuart Mill, David Ricardo, and other founders of the field understood their subject matter. Political economics understood economic behavior to be rooted in everyday life, beliefs, customs, and values.

However, during the late nineteenth century and expanding during the twentieth century, the understanding and examination of economic behavior changed. In an effort to make social studies appear more "scientific," mathematical modeling became all the rage (and still is). Researchers began to separate the understanding of economic behavior from its cultural, legal, political, and moral contexts—to create *"objective" universal laws of economic behavior* that aim to rival Newton's laws of physics.

Alfred Marshall (1895) severed the term economics from the moniker "*political* economics" in an attempt to appear more scientific, more objective, and to simplify the subject matter. This move followed on the heels of the scientism applied to the development and application of statistics to human beings by Francis Galton (1870), the person who coined the term "social Darwinism" and who initiated the field of eugenics along with Karl (originally spelled with a C) Pearson, the founding occupant, and only holder of the eugenics professorship sponsored by Galton at the University College London.[4] The effort to make economics into a social physics had more to do with an academic inferiority complex as science and engineering surged forward with success, while social and moral studies showed little gains. Although new machines and technologies solved old material problems, social issues such as war, poverty, and injustice seemed, and continue to seem, intractable.

This trend to objectify and dissociate social status from human beings (separating poverty as a number from the poor) via quantification has had

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[4]With the rise of Nazism, the endowed chair was unceremoniously eliminated after Pearson's death in 1936. Galton and Pearson founded the journal *Biometrika* thus promoting the reduction of human behavior to biological precursors, especially correlating intelligence scores with much more complex phenomena such as income and criminality.

many consequences. One has been to claim that economics has no political, or more critically, no moral dimension. The mathematical models that aim to construct a context-free understanding of economic behaviors face fatal error in results and explanations. Many European economists have labeled the neoliberal laissez-faire approach to understanding economic behavior while ignoring historical, cultural, and political context to be misguided, narrow-minded, "autistic" (Fulbrook, 2007).

Examples are the devastating austerity policies imposed by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund on various parts of the world. Another was the massive failure of Long-Term Capital Management (LTCM) run by John W. Meriwether and two Nobel Prize winners in mathematical economics, Myron Scholes and Robert Merton. They literally programmed a computer with a set of equations (the Black-Scholes model to dynamically hedge against risk and volatility), turned it on and went golfing (Dunbar, 2000; Stein, 2003). Initially it made money for its elite investors but then the real world happened, which they did not expect. A year into operation, in 1997 the Asian housing bubble burst, in part due to IMF-imposed austerity policies, and then in 1998 Boris Yeltsin devalued the ruble and allowed Russia to default on its domestic debt (Jacque, 2010). As the world's investors in Russia and Asia scrambled, the computer at LTCM just kept blindly, irrationally running only now it was compounding massive losses (Stein, 2003). The level of arrogance and narcissism exhibited by the mathematical financial experts and bankers was astounding (Jacque, 2010; Stein, 2003). The failure started a chain reaction, a global crisis throughout financial markets (Dunbar, 2000; Stein, 2003). The US government turned off the computer and the Federal Reserve Bank of New York rushed in to organize a bailout of $3.625 billion to prevent total collapse of the world's financial markets (Lowenstein, 2000). Trust was reestablished when the adults came into the room and imposed rational regulation. The total loss was about $4.6 billion (Weiner, 2007).

The LTCM disaster is a perfect example of autistic economics in action, what Jacque (2010) has called the malpractice of pure theory. The human element had been removed and LTCM's computer could not read the newspaper to see what was happening in the real world or regulate itself. Computers are neither conscious nor intelligent. They cannot step outside of their own programming and reflect on the rationality of what they are doing. Computers do not and *cannot* care about process or results. To a computer there is no such thing as a "mistake" or immorality. It cannot judge its own operation, stop and rewrite its own programming.

When economies are seen as self-operating systems driven by universal laws, then finance appears to have no free will, no ideology, no choice. Given this paradigm, morals and ethics are not eliminated but ignored and left to deteriorate (van Inwagen, 1983). Denial of realities in favor of a mathematical fantasy has had profound consequences. Austerity may hurt someone, somewhere, but such finite contingencies are irrelevant to the larger logic of economic movement. The "wizards" of global economic policy thus appear to not care, which enrages populations that suddenly see food subsidies slashed resulting in the price of cooking oil (Brazil in 2010) or bread (Egypt in 1977) rising 1000% overnight, sparking riots (Trostle, Marti, Rosen, & Westcott, 2011; Westall & Perry, 2013).

More recently, many have moved the field of economics back toward more complex efforts to understand economic behavior by taking into account aspects of that behavior which are cultural, legal, historical, and *moral*. Free market, neoclassical, and neoliberal forms are all essentially euphemisms for the disastrous laissez-faire economics of the late nineteenth century (Krugman, 2011). Stiglitz (2003, 2013) has been pointing out for years that what we have is global governance by financial institutions without a global government. It's an engine with no regulation. It will run more and more aggressively until it blows up.

Homelessness: Being Among the Wolves

> What's really challenging is finding stability. You know, and I can find that internally, within. But it's really hard when you don't have a job. – Hanna

> That's why I'm just like, pardon my French, fuck the corporate world, the government, and all that stuff, 'cause if you truly go research and stuff, they're actually fucking us more than they're helping us. – Haile

The old adage about the "wolf at the door," presumes that one has a house with a door. If you don't, you are among them. Being homeless is a tipping point within a process of destitution. And millions of Americans are dangerously close to that point (Henry et al., 2013). It is not a permanent condition but a transient identity, one that many assume sometime during their lives.

As many as 90% of homeless people suffer transitional or episodic homelessness (Bassuk, DeCandia, Beach, & Berman, 2014). That means that many Americans have been homeless for short periods of time. It also

means that for this reason it is impossible to determine precisely how many people are homeless in America by means of point-in-time counts. On any given night in America, about 600,000 people are counted in shelters including children and families (Bassuk et al., 2014). Homeless youth is one of the fastest growing and most vulnerable segments of the US homeless population, with over 1,258,182 homeless students, including 62,890 unaccompanied youth, enrolled in public schools in the 2012–2013 academic year (National Center for Homeless Education, 2014; Rahman, Turner, & Elbedour, 2015). About one in 30 children in America or 2.5 million were homeless at some point during 2013 (Bassuk et al., 2014; Pergamit et al., 2013). Because of the high turnover of homeless people and the fact that many experience homelessness a few nights a year, the number of Americans experiencing homelessness is much higher than any single point-in-time measure.

According to the US census, 14.8% of the US population, or 46.7 million people, are in poverty (DeNavas-Walt & Proctor, 2015). In most cases, homelessness is not due to lack of work but largely due to low-income wages (National Coalition for the Homeless, 2009). Burt et al. (1999) found that 44% of the homeless reported paid work in the past month, including 20% who worked in a job lasting or expected to last at least three months.[5] Homelessness is not due to a lack of shelter either. There are about six times as many vacant homes in America as there are homeless people (Bronson, 2011). Since 2007, banks have foreclosed on and shuttered about 18.5 million homes while about 3.5 million homeless "shiver in the cold" (Loha, 2011).

The cause is not material but socio-culturally determined economics. We say socio-culturally determined because a person or nation may have money but what they decide to do with it is a matter of values, motives, beliefs, and expectations (culture). Being poor and homeless is not a matter of fatalistic laws of physics. It is a matter of choices people make. Consequently, it is a matter of ethics and morality (van Inwagen, 1983).

The wolf, it seems, is always at our door. Increasingly in the modern world, we are on our own. Dire poverty and destitution exists literally right beside massive, excess wealth. When living in Boston many years ago, we marveled at a society that would heat and light giant, largely empty skyscrapers all night long but lock the doors to people literally

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[5] Despite the advanced age of the data, which was collected in 1996, in Burt et al.'s (1999) study, this is the most recent data available on employment rate of the homeless (Jacobson, 2013).

freezing to death huddled up against the granite and marble facades at the bases of these megalithic towers. How is this acceptable? Clearly such people are seeking to survive and need help.

This is not a natural disaster. It is a human-made one. We don't like to acknowledge it, but every large city in America either has municipal-operated crews or subcontracts crews that are responsible for picking up the dead from the streets. Ron Gospodarski and Juan Osteguin, owners of a biorecovery business, noted it takes a "strong stomach" to stay in their business as they often clean up "atrocities" (Sahadi, 2005).

LEGITIMIZING SUFFERING: NATURAL SELECTION AND DARWINIAN ECONOMICS

I'm like, "Oh look at what they all have that I don't have." "Oh, look, normal people. Ohh." [laughs] Yeah, I I've been getting a little bit bitter, I mean. I've already been excluded most of my life and now this is just one more stack against me that makes me even more excluded. You know, I'm just so sick of it. [laughs]. It's like I'm not a real person. – Hilary

The destitute [is the most challenging thing], I guess. Because there's nothing you can do. You can't work. You're waiting. In my position, I'm just waiting day after day after day after day. You don't know whether you're going to make it. You don't know anything. And in my particular case, I hadn't taken any of my medications in six months, so I'm not sure if I'm going to make it anyway, you know? – Harris

How do we stomach the fact that millions of people experience homelessness in the United States every year? One way is to justify it to ourselves by means of a social Darwinian philosophy (Cronley, 2010; Kramer, 2003; Kramer & Kim, 2009). People are homeless because they are lazy or stupid. Yet we find no homeless in the premodern world. In the Mesolithic and Neolithic hamlet and village, the collective protected even the "village idiot."

Homelessness among the homed is a modern consequence of impersonal mass social structures that allow us to avoid personal responsibility (Honneth, 1996; Ikeda & Kramer, 1999; Kramer & Lee, 1999). Nothing is more impersonal than the laws of nature, which have been used as a convenient excuse for oppression. Natural law is objective and beyond human control. So if something like homelessness is "naturalized," put into the mythology of being natural, it is no longer debatable (Barthes,

1957/2013). It becomes inevitable, fatalistically certain, predictable. It is fruitless to try to regulate natural forces. There is no freedom between cause and inevitable effect. Therefore, as the logic goes, there is no moral dimension to such issues. Nature simply takes its course. Perhaps the greatest example of this legitimation of irresponsible leadership was the Great Hunger in Ireland during the 1840s.

Being homeless, like the Irish of the great starvation who scrambled to escape chronic destitution, were described as "landless cabin dwellers" (Clark, 1982, p. 44).[6] During the great Irish Famine, Assistant Secretary to Her Majesty's Treasury, Sir Charles Trevelyan (1848) officially forbade any and all efforts to assist the starving people of Ireland. Even churches were officially barred from aiding the poor. Trevelyan did so because in his opinion it was nature's transcending way to eliminate the weak and unworthy of life. He wrote at the time: "Our measures must proceed with as little disturbance as possible of the ordinary course of private trade, which must ever be the chief resource for the subsistence of the people…" (Trevelyan quoted by Bourke, 1977).

While millions of Irish peasants starved, Trevelyan made a show of publicly blaming the landed gentry for not improving their estates by instructing the peasants to plant a variety of crops. However, even as he criticized the gentry he knew that Ireland was exporting tons of wheat, barley, and other "cash crops." People who tended the fields were starving in the midst of plenty. Trevelyan's public letters to newspapers castigating the gentry for expecting the government to help correct the situation justified the failure of the British government to act (Trevelyan quoted in Gray, 1995, pp. 154–155). As the potato blight spread to the western highlands of Scotland peasants there too began to starve, so thousands were deported by official decree to Australia.

Transcendental essentialism and universalism presume naturalistic innocence (Husserl, 1962). Laws of nature, thus, dictate who is worth helping and who is not. Those who are worth helping conveniently

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[6] But these "cabins" were not what one might think of as a nice little lakeside abode. Rather the Earl of Devon, writing for a Royal Commission in 1845 described the living conditions of the Irish peasants thus: "It would be impossible adequately to describe the privations which they [the Irish labourer and his family] habitually and silently endure … in many districts their only food is the potato, their only beverage water … their cabins are seldom a protection against the weather … a bed or a blanket is a rare luxury … and nearly in all their pig and a manure heap constitute their only property" (Devon quoted by Woodham-Smith, 1962/1992, p. 24).

don't need help because they have already exhibited rapacious vigor by voraciously helping themselves. Trevelyan who was in charge of government relief for the Irish claimed: "The judgment of God sent the calamity to teach the Irish a lesson" and whosoever contradicts "an all-wise and all-merciful Providence in its sharp but effectual remedy" for "social evil would prove evil himself" (quoted in Woodham-Smith, 1962/1992, pp. 87, 106–108). Thus ideological choices are naturalized or spiritualized and made to seem fatalistically beyond human volition. To be poor in modern capitalism is finally identified with personal sin, or inherently bad personality traits. The poor deserve to be poor. And those who try to help them are evil. Hence, we see the eugenic solution to breed in desirable traits and breed out undesirable ones.

Today's homeless in America are even worse off. They are powerless but without even a cabin. A vast number of Americans are "upside down" regarding money owed, meaning that they owe more on their house and car, and perhaps their college degree, than they are worth. Two Princeton University economists, Greg Kaplan and Justin Weidner, and their coauthor Giovanni Violante of New York University estimated that about one-third of all American households, more than 100 million Americans, lived paycheck-to-paycheck in 2014, and that for the poor and lower working class, this is a long-term, chronically stressful, life condition (Ingraham, 2014; Kaplan, Violante, & Weidner, 2014). This means they have little or no savings and carry chronic debt: Counting all households including ones with no debt, the average US household owes $7281. For those with credit card debt, which is about half of all American households, the average balance owed is $15,609. All households average $156,706 in mortgage debt. Student debt averages $32,956 (Federal Reserve Statistical Release 2015). Failure to service so much debt keeps millions of families, including many that falsely believe they are middle class or even upper middle class, at risk (Federal Reserve Statistical Release, 2015; Kaplan et al., 2014).

One might like to think that modern capitalism eliminated the inhumane institutions of slavery and debt peonage. But such practices as well as the most predatory forms of capitalism have been justified by alluding to and distorting old notions of IQ and the new science of genetics. Some of the representative work in this new Darwinian genre include *The Bell Curve* (Herrnstein & Murray, 1994) and *The Global Bell Curve*

(Lynn, 2008).[7] Under the shadow of the social Darwinian defense of, and the pseudo-scientific justification for inequality, even Christian altruism came to be seen as a myth—as the misplaced sentimentality of "bleeding heart" liberals. Care and aid, according to this ideology, is useless. Caring about poor (and dumb) people is a waste of resources. According to this philosophy, all human interaction can be explained in terms of self-interested competition and exchange (Homans, 1958). But Homans (1958) was not an original thinker. Two hundred years earlier, during the English Enlightenment, Jeremy Bentham (1789/2007) methodized his philosophy as "hedonic calculus." Thus the very British notion of equating utilitarian self-interest with rationality itself was consecrated. John Stuart Mill, the son of Bentham's closest colleague and collaborator (James Mill) would later clarify the notion of self-interest as sacred right in his essay *On Liberty* (Mill, 1859/2002) which would inspire the quintessentially modern individualistic virtue of the "pursuit of happiness" as an inalienable God-given universal right.[8] In this essay, Mill clearly pits the authority of government against the right of individual freedom. Yet he also makes an argument that upheld colonial power and racism by stating that "Despotism is a legitimate mode of government in dealing with barbarians" and children (Mill, 1859/2002, pp. 18–19). Thus, British utilitarianism, including the very notion of individual liberty itself, supported the moral principles that justified suppression of poor people—a point not lost on many critics of neoliberalism such as Losurdo (2011) and Goldberg (2000).

Modern morality came to be steeped in colonial self-righteousness and justified via reductionism to economic advantage (Cronley, 2010). In the end, poor people do not serve the ultimate modern demand for utility and

[7] Rooted in such ideologically charged "pseudo-science" (and statistical confusion) is the unfounded proposition that a particular form of competition as understood by a specific culture at a specific time is universal, a matter of natural law, and that inherent intelligence is reducible to racial membership (see the Nobel Prize-winning economist Heckman's (1995) systematic dismantling of the statistical mess that is *The Bell Curve's* argument).

[8] Conrad and Muccino (2006) wrote a screenplay entitled *The Pursuit of Happyness* depicting the rags-to-riches story of Chris Gardner. The film, starring Will Smith as Gardner, a homeless salesman, captures the irony of modern economic reality, underscored by the purposeful misspelling of happiness as "happyness." What is wrong with the story, as with the spelling, is that, like all Horatio Alger stories of the American Dream, it functions to camouflage the truth that most never make it out of rags. In fact, they die still owing money. As LeRoy came to understand, in post-Vietnam America upward mobility has increasingly become a violated expectation.

efficiency. The opposite of utility (fitness, usefulness, value) is to be unfit, useless, of no value, which is exactly how those who do not "work right" are defined in assimilationist, neo-Darwinian "adaptation" terms (Kramer, 1997, 2003). The maladapted are unfit. Similarly, the opposite of efficient is deficient, defective, flawed, a form of unwanted waste that should be discarded. This is what occurs when people are seen as mere resource base by an industrial mind-set. The unproductive are not worthy of dignity or care. They are a liability rather than an asset, and there is no other way to view people.

The great irony here is that this mind-set that sees people strictly from this narrow valuation claims this attitude to be objective. This is the case because with modern mass anonymity, measured productivity does not assess who the worker is, only how much they produce. Thus it seems objective and even quantifiable, but in fact the modern world is harshly judgmental of those who are slow, less productive, or who harbor unique interests and talents that cannot be readily exploited. In the modern world, unless a person or thing such as a river or forest can be converted into a commodity and thusly exploited, it has no value (Marx, 1935). Value is realized only at the moment of exchange. This appears "objective," and "disinterested," but in fact it is highly motivated by the ambition for profit. If I cannot exploit you for my own utility, you have no meaning to me.

Bentham (1789/2007) equated the pursuit of self-interest as rationality in itself, and the only utilitarian, or common-sensical path of action. Utility was literally introduced by Bentham (1789/2007) as a simple measure based on a balance sheet between pain and pleasure. Thus, reason became equated with the most base of motives rooted in individualism. To not be selfish was to be unreasonable and the opposite of genius. It was to be stupid.

Essential to Darwinism generally and the English colonial pseudo-science of social Darwinism as expounded by Galton (1870) in his famous work *Hereditary Genius* (in which he coined the term "eugenics") is the idea of survival of the fittest in endless conflict. Fundamental axioms of social Darwinism were championed more recently by Rand (1964) who dichotomized the world into what she claimed to be irrational social support found in collectivistic cultures and modern rationality manifested as pure self-interest, an ideology that inspires many to this day. She attacked communism not because it espoused atheism, for she herself was an avowed atheist, and distrusted the central Christian tenets of love, sacrifice, and comradeship within a church community. Instead she attacked

communism because she fervently promoted the "virtue of selfishness," and vehemently disapproved of notions of assistance, aid, altruism, or self-sacrifice for another or for a "greater good," as being utterly unnatural, dishonest, and simply stupid (Rand, 1964).

Social Darwinists see no grace in empathizing or sympathizing with others. Social Darwinism came to justify slavery in the Americas and the structural starvation of millions in Great Britain while authorities stood by and did nothing. This abominable ideology still influences the debate about poverty today, and it is reinforced by the modern concept of the individualism. The two ideologies, social Darwinism and hypertrophic individualism, form a two-pronged justification for not helping the poor (Cronley, 2010; Kramer et al., 2014; Kramer & Lee, 1999). On one hand, it is useless to try to help them because they are genetically predisposed to fail and no amount of aid can change the laws of nature. On the other hand, the poor's failure to be self-sufficient is due to personal character flaws that may or may not be rooted in inherent personality traits. Strategic ambiguity exists within debates about poverty regarding the idea that character is inherent but yet also learned.

According to modern understanding, prior cause for the effect of poverty must be identified. The state of poverty is merely a result. The true target of inquiry is the cause. Two transcending justifications exist for why the poor are poor: moral "bankruptcy" and biological predetermination. While the argument that poor people are poor because of genetic predisposition is completely different from the argument that poor people are poor due to choices they freely make, those arguing against assistance commonly use both (Lyon-Callo, 2000; Tyler & Melander, 2013). Either way, helping the destitute is a waste of time akin to denying the laws of physics, or equally futile, resisting divine judgment. Consequently, withdrawal of help and resources is rational, justified, even *moral* (Honneth, 2000/2014; Lyon-Callo, 2000). Bottom line, those who argue that they are not their brother's keeper have all bases covered.

In the modern world, the emotion that drives immediate aid to those in need is displaced by analysis and systematic reasons (hedonic calculus) for not helping them rooted in transcendental principles stated as objective, qua unquestionable, premises (Greene & Haidt, 2002; Kramer, 1997). Such arguments proceed as truisms—which are rhetorical rather than scientific or rational. Hence, rationalization is the opposite of actually being rational or objective. Rather it is an excuse for protecting self-interest by denying responsibility to and for others.

Conclusion

> People have no idea. They think we're just a bunch of bums sitting around, getting drunk. But it's hard. Nowhere to sleep and no one wants to hire you. You can't have good hygiene and they don't want to be around that and they don't want to hire you. They think we're stupid and lazy. And they don't know what it's like until they've slept on this shit right here [pounds on concrete]. Until they do that, they have no idea what it's like. The people sleeping in their beds, they have no idea what it's like to wake up on the concrete [laughs] with a pair of shoes for a pillow, if you have that. – Hank

The basic facts about the relationship between destitution and homelessness have not changed. However, the number of Americans who are acutely vulnerable has. When we see a homeless person, perhaps we are gazing at a living flesh and blood periscope.[9]

Gadamer (1960/2005) characterized communication as a risk. Whenever we are exposed to something new (purposefully or accidentally) our horizon is affected. Freedom is how we respond to what happens to us and how we respond changes with experience (van Inwagen, 1983). Overt, organized social movements are nearly always reactionary—responding to perceived injustice and/or aggression. The new makes the previous old as such, and so dependent cocreation results in change. If communication occurs this is unavoidable (Honneth, 1996). But building relationships, coalitions, organizations, and communication takes time. Those with temporal resources have advantages on directing change. Sadly, more often than not, the homeless are out of resources, including time. They are at the mercy of Others.

The point of this chapter was to directly engage the issue of ethics and a culture that justifies cruelty to its own members. Our path was not to propose laws or moral rules. It is not about a rational self-management of "freedom" (deontology), or the modern utilitarian calculation of happiness (hedonic calculus ala Jeremy Bentham), or the romantic ideal of cultivating instituted virtues (virtue ethics). Rather this is about encountering ourselves in the Other (see also Honneth, 1996, 2000/2014). It is about intersubjectivity and the possibility of being "good," as in good actions and good motives linked to the good life here and now. It is about the

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[9] We use periscope in this context to mean a slice of the sacred. The word technically means a cut-and-paste piece of a sacred text. A homeless person, any human is a fragment of the sacred, worthy of respect. A child is more valuable than the rarest Bible. Burn the sutras because the sacred is all around us.

ethical gravity of the embodied encounter, of standing in the presence of a homeless person.

In this world we share, the homeless and the Others live parallel lives. Do any of us recognize the loss or gain of humanity in the moments we gaze upon one another? In life, we often do not realize when important moments have passed. It may be when we are in our late teens and we say goodbye to someone who had been a life-long friend for us, thinking we would meet again but we never did. It is only later that we realize what happened and reidentify that person as a "childhood friend." We may think we will always see them again, but with the passage of time, we realize that a friendship or even an era in our lives slipped away unnoticed. What is happening to our humanity?

Being homeless is a process. People may be fired or laid off in an instant, divorced with the stroke of a pen, but being homeless is not an official title. It is an existential condition with infinite degrees of isolation. Of course the meaning of home usually implies a physical domicile where one can "get in" from the "outside." It also has the sense of a retreat, a refuge where one can be at ease and receive social visitors. Home is a place known and understood. The outside, the not home, is filled with uncertainties and anxieties. Most importantly, home is the place where domestic affections are centered. Without a home, affection and civility are at extreme risk and so too, therefore, is humanity.

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